United Nations

Daily Highlights

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MONDAY HIGHLIGHTS

+ Secretary-General condemns attack on United Nations plane in Croatia and wounding of German worker in humanitarian airlift; urges end to such hostile actions.

+ Secretary-General asks Security Council to accept request by El Salvador for United Nations verification of March 1994 elections.

+ In Cambodia, acts of harassment against UNTAC personnel and between rival political factions are occurring regularly, according to UNTAC spokesman.

+ Permanent Observer for Palestine to United Nations says Security Council acceptance of recent agreement between Israel and United States would be "tantamount to legitimizing deportation".

+ Committee on Elimination of Discrimination against Women, concluding three-week session in Vienna, approves text on women's role in family; adopts recommendations for submission to 1993 World Conference on Human Rights.

+ United Nations role in environmental conflict resolution subject of new study published by UNITAR.

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Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali has strongly condemned an incident over the weekend in which a German crew member was wounded when an aircraft of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), taking part in a humanitarian airlift to Sarajevo, came under fire while flying south-west of Karlovac in Croatia. The crew member, who sustained shrapnel injuries in the abdomen, was hospitalized for treatment and is reported to be in stable condition.

In a statement issued today at Headquarters, the Secretary-General said he was deeply concerned that a plane participating in the humanitarian airlift for the suffering citizens of Bosnia and Herzegovina had been attacked.

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Such incidents, he said, not only endangered the lives of relief workers and impeded the delivery of urgently needed humanitarian aid, but further jeopardized the international community's efforts to bring an end to the conflict in the former Yugoslavia. The Secretary-General called on all parties to cease immediately all hostile actions against United Nations personnel and aircraft.

According to a press release issued today by the UNHCR, the attack had forced the agency to interrupt temporarily all airlift operations from Zagreb airport. The airlift resumed today after a 36-hour interruption, with French and American planes flying a different route from their bases in France and Germany.

High Commissioner Sadako Ogata also condemned the attack, calling it a "vile and revolting act", and demanded a full explanation for the incident. According to the UNHCR, there have been more than 45 serious incidents involving the operation to airlift humanitarian aid to the people of Sarajevo. The most serious was the downing of an Italian plane on 3 September in which all four crew members died.

Meanwhile, the Chief of Mission for the United Nations Protection Force (UNPROFOR), Cedric Thornberry, has sent a letter of protest to the Serbian authorities. According to a United Nations spokesman today, the letter stated among other things that UNPROFOR personnel had observed the attack carried out by the Serbian Territorial Defence Forces operating a 23-millimetre anti-aircraft gun.

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The Secretary-General has asked the Security Council to accept a request by El Salvador for United Nations verification of the forthcoming presidential, legislative and municipal elections in that country.

In a letter to the Council President, dated 26 January, the Secretary-General wrote that the elections, scheduled for March 1994, would be the first to take place after the end of the conflict and would in the normal course of events constitute the "logical culmination of the entire peace process".

The Secretary-General has previously proposed that the extra personnel needed by the United Nations Observer Mission in El Salvador (ONUSAL) for its monitoring of the elections would be "phased in" and their assignment would end immediately after the elections.

Mr. Boutros-Ghali will present a report to the Council in due course indicating the administrative and financial implications of the Salvadoran request (document S/25241).

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A spokesman for the United Nations Transitional Authority in Cambodia (UNTAC) said today that acts of minor harassment against UNTAC personnel and between rival political factions were occurring regularly all over the country and that most of them could not be attributed to anyone in particular as they were caused by "unknown assailants".

At a press briefing in Phnom Penh, the spokesman, Eric Falt, said that some of the incidents were definitely attributed to representatives of the Party of the State of Cambodia.

He cited an incident of 4 February in the Siempang District in which the Commander of the Cambodian People's Armed Forces (CPAF), accompanied by seven fully-armed soldiers, had gone into the office of a political party, known as FUNCINPEC, in search of a person who had earlier complained to UNTAC of harassment by the CPAF. The soldiers, who were reportedly under the influence of alcohol, had removed party posters and threatened to kill all persons present if the incident was reported to UNTAC. A civilian-police monitor who had attempted to stop the group was also threatened. However, the spokesman said, an UNTAC patrol of Uruguayan peace-keepers had managed to stop the incident and had moved the CPAF soldiers from the scene.

In general, the spokesman said, there were now fewer cease-fire violations committed by the CPAF and the National Alliance of Democratic Kampuchea (NADK).

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The Permanent Observer for Palestine at the United Nations has said that the recent "agreement" between the Israeli and the United States Governments on the issue of the deportation of more than 400 Palestinians in mid-December was not in compliance with the Security Council's resolution 799 (1992) demanding the safe and immediate return of all the expelled Palestinians.

In a letter to the Secretary-General, dated 4 February, the Permanent Observer for Palestine, M. Nasser Al-Kidwa, said the agreement "did not fulfil the demand made by the Security Council" and that acceptance of it would be "tantamount to legitimizing deportation".

The Council was "duty-bound" to consider immediately the report submitted by the Secretary-General in which he urged the Council to take "whatever measures" to ensure the return of all the Palestinians, the letter stated (document S/ 25242).

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Ending its twelfth session in Vienna on Friday, 5 February, the Committee on Elimination of Discrimination against Women substantively approved a draft recommendation on women's rights in marriage and family and decided to postpone the final adoption of the recommendation until the Committee's 1994 session.

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The Committee also adopted a set of recommendations to the World Conference on Human Rights, to be held in Vienna from 14 to 25 June, aimed at ensuring that women and men's rights are treated on an equal basis within the framework of general human rights.

In other action, the Committee asked its Chairman, Ivanka Corti, expert from Italy, to send a letter on its behalf to the Special Rapporteur on the human rights situation in the former Yugoslavia, calling for an investigation of all violations of the human rights of women in the countries concerned.

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The United Nations Institute for Training and Research (UNITAR) has published a study on the United Nations role in the prevention and resolution of international environmental conflicts.

The author of the book, Jon Martin Trolldalen, a former environmental specialist at the World Bank, writes that conflicts between nations are due not only to political or military threats, but to the use or misuse of the world's limited natural resources and fragile environment. He warns that local, national, regional and global resources are being stretched at an "unprecedented rate" which is destabilizing the world's ecological balance. That trend, he says, is likely to increase and create additional ecological surprises such as depletion of the ozone layer, sudden loss of species and change in the quality of vital resources as well as other unexpected environmental deterioration.

The study has been conducted in response to growing concern over the increase in international conflicts that are due in part to environmental degradation and offers suggestions on how international environmental conflicts might be prevented.

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